The
Progressive Review
Nbr 279 May 1989

Bringing Politics Home

Sam Smith

American Artifacts, Late Empire Period: *Michael Milken, Exxon Valdez, John Tower, Jim and Tammy Baaker, alar, Ivan Boesky, Korean cars, Jimmy Swaggart, drug wars, Pete Rose, Michael Deaver, negative trade balances, Dan Quayle, Pentagon contractors, Morton Downey Jr., Japanese office buildings, Donald Trump, wilding in Central Park, Iran-Contra, Jim Wright, national deficits, urine testing of high school cheerleaders, Geraldo Rivera, the greenhouse effect, Marion Barry, savings & loans.*

Oh yes, and a video game called 'Robocop,' subtitled 'The Future of Law Enforcement' in which the officer on the screen kills a score of people just waiting for someone to insert a quarter.

o

In *Systemantics*, John Gall argues that "systems tend to oppose their proper functions." The ideal proper function of the American system is life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Yet was it gropes its way into the third century, the system in reality increasingly endangers human life, denies personal liberty and represses individual happiness.

The evidence of the paradox is all around:

o The *New York Times* recently reported growing recognition that our cities are in some ways worse off than they were 30 years ago, despite years of urban planning, billions of dollars, and 'downtown revitalization.'

o According to a study by the House Ways and Means Committee, average family income of the poorest fifth of the country, after correction for inflation, is 6% lower than it was in 1979, while that of the highest fifth is 11% higher.

o We are beginning to discover the true ecological costs of nuclear power, corporate farming and hyper-industrialization, and are slowly deprogramming ourselves from the cult of science and technology.

o After forty years of the Cold War we are learning that we should have been counting toaster ovens and television sets instead of missiles and tanks. About 64% of downtown Los Angeles is owned by foreign corporations.

o According to a Harris survey, the leisure time of the average American has shrunk 37% since 1973. The average work week, including commuting, has increased during the same period from 41 to 47 hours.

o Patagonia, the retailer, gives ten percent of its pretax profits to support environmental organizations. Founder Yvon Chouinard says that of the 250 groups he has funded, 225 "just fight the government."

o Not finally, but enough for now is the tawdry procession of major figures from many of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

our most revered institutions -- the church, capitalism, Congress, media and professional baseball -- destroying themselves and our myths in the prints and on the tube.

It is not a particularly graceful or perceptive way in which to end our imperial era. We have no DeGaulle or Mountbatten to help ease the way from the imperial to the mundane. Indeed, most of our leaders seem possessed of one or both of two notions: either that the system is working despite all contra-indications or that history can be reversed by a few pieces of well-chosen legislation or a cleverly designed public relations campaign: *Just Say No to the Facts.*

Unfortunately, complex failing systems have little capacity to save themselves. In part this is because the solutions come from the same source as the problem. The public rarely questions the anomaly; official Washington and the media honor it. Even a failure as miserable as that of Vietnam has had little effect on the careers of its major protagonists, who remain quoted copiously, cited as experts and transmogrified into statesmen.

Failure compounded with notoriety is worth still more. Thus, Edwin Meese and Oliver North can count on much larger lecture fees than, say, Marion Wright Edelman or Jim Hightower.

USA Today recently held a dinner to honor its retiring publisher. It boasted that the dinner would be attended by some of the nation's "best and brightest." Prominently mentioned on the guest list, along with predictable fellow publishers, were Vice President Quayle, Lee Atwater and Senator Larry Pressler. America has a problem.

o

Complex systems usually try to save themselves by doing the same they have been doing badly all along -- only harder. This is because the salvation of the system is implicitly considered far more important the solution of any problems that might be causing the system to fail. Solutions that bring into question the effectiveness of the system itself are not tolerated.

We have seen some classic examples of this phenomenon in recent times. The Vietnamese War quickly became a battle to justify the decision to enter it. As it lost all other purpose, the military-political system became incapable of facing either battlefield or political reality until confronted with a proto-revolution of the young.

In the Alaskan oil spill, we find ourselves relying upon the world's largest government and the world's largest corporation to repair the damage caused by *their* policies. We become angry when we find it isn't working, although there is no logical reason for these flawed systems to work better in crisis than in ordinary times. We might as well expect a mugger to care for the wounds of his victim.

THE PROGRESSIVE REVIEW
The Progressive Review is published approximately 9 times a year. Formerly the DC Gazette. One year subscription: $12. Two year subscription: $21. The Review uses the news services of College Press Service, Pacific News Service, Women's News Institute and the National Student News Service. The Review has a fax and monitors both Compuserve and Peacenet. Editor: Sam Smith

The Progressive Review
1739 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington DC 20009
202-232-5544
Fax Nbr: 202-234-6222
Compuserve ID# 72067,1525
Peacenet Handle: ssmith

And then, of course, there is the miserable, ineffective, and hypocritical "war on drugs." Armed with such mindless principles as "Just Say No" and "Zero Tolerance," our drug policy is being driven by its military metaphor. That the situation might have more in common with a health epidemic than with a military engagement is hardly discussed. That we might never *win,* but only mitigate, is not considered at all. And to question whether the state should trash its constitution in order to prevent a small number of people from making damn fools of themselves is considered akin to drug trafficking itself.

And so, in my city of Washington, we plan to build *new prisons, add seven hundred more police officers,* maybe call in the National Guard, put all those under 18 under house arrest after 11 pm, and flagrantly indulge in such unconstitutional activities as jump-out squads. It is all the system knows how to do: the same thing only harder.

Robert Dupont, a former high government drug official and now a professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University, has even gone so far as to propose in the *Washington Post* that there be mandatory drug tests for attending school or getting a driver's licence. Those who failed drug tests repeatedly would be incarcerated in "large, temporary health shelters." Sure, there would be some invasion of privacy and civil rights, said the doctor, but "This is a price we would need to pay for life in a modern, interdependent community."

The actual results of the Washington's war on drugs to date have been to increase the slaughter on the streets, to do absolutely nothing to reduce the drug problem itself, to imprison a city behind the walls of its own fear, and to encourage psychiatrists to propose totalitarianism as the cure. The system, in its manic efforts to justify itself, is driving itself mad and taking the rest of us with it.

o

The question we should be asking is not what the system should be doing but whether the existing system can do anything except to make matters worse, all the more so by trying to do something about it.

After all, the drug problem is only one of our miseries. Solving it will not lower the mean summer temperatures, raise the morality of the legal, political and financial trades, get oil off the feathers of seagulls or turn professional baseball players once more into the boys of summer.

The drug problem, in truth, is merely an outward and visible sign of a multitude of other crises. It is a symptom of the bored, underpaid or underfulfilled worker; the teenager without hope; the parent alone and adrift; the city without community; the education without meaning; the graduate without moral vision; the culture without purpose. To find drugs a reasonable alternative, one must have a dismal expectation of the world. Sadly, for many Americans, this is the case.

o

Ironically, we have come to this state in no small part because of our willingness to turn over individual and communal functions to the very system that we now ask to save us.

Functions formerly performed by family, community and church have now been assumed by government and, to an increasing but unappreciated degree, by the private corporation. Conservative rhetoric and liberal defensiveness keeps the focus on the governmental aspect of centralization, but in many ordinary aspects of human life, corporate centralization is just as intrusive.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Consider the modern shopping mall, a common contemporary replacement for the town business district. Although these complexes clearly serve a public function (and are often built thanks to considerable public concessions), they are in fact controlled by a single corporation. This corporation may, without any consultation with the public that uses the mall, enact a wide variety of laws that will be enforced by the public police. There have been repeated cases where corporate owners have sought to deny the public its constitutional rights, such as those of the First Amendment, on the grounds that the petitioners were on private property. The village square has been privatized.

Highrise apartment buildings offer another example of corporate autocracy. The highrise owners often brag in their advertising of the wonderful 'community' they have created for their tenants, but unlike a traditional community, the rules for trash collection, control of pets and barbecue grills, and security, are not decided by an elected council but by the corporate lord of the manor.

Further, such former territories of private initiative as sports, culture and charity have been invaded by the corporation in a manner in which government still would not dare. Thus the ads on spinnakers and runner's T-shirts, the Ronald McDonald Houses, the subtle blending of art and advertising. A new enterprise has even started hawking video 'educational' materials to school systems complete with commercials.

Even when the question is one of state control, conservatives deserve far more credit than they get. Both liberals and conservatives have consistently favored state centralization, the difference being that conservatives have tended to want the government to assume controlling functions while liberals and progressives want government to take over caring functions. Thus under conservatives, we get more missiles and prisons, while under liberals we get more day care centers and farm subsidies.

o

As government and corporations take more control over what was once the domain of the individual and the community, they become surrogates for individual and community. And often poor ones.

Since, however, much of this centralization occurs in the arguable name of progress, we seldom address the long-range effects of such change. As the system becomes more cumbersome, we happily embrace solutions that seem to offer individuals at least a fighting chance in their struggles with the system. We willingly suspend seemingly abstract doubts in order to survive. We may, for example, wonder what children raised in corporate day care centers will actually turn out to be like, but we do not wonder too long or too loudly because our economic system appears to offer little other alternative.

In fact, this is not true. We can ask the how of what we do as well as the what; it is simply that the nature of our political discourse never seems to allow us the opportunity.

In 1910, G. K. Chesterton described two characters, Hudge and Gudge, whose thinking evolved in such disparate manners that the one came to favor the building of large public tenements for the poor while the other believed that these public projects were so awful that the slums from whence they came were in fact preferable. Chesterton's moral:

*Such is the lamentable history of Hudge and Gudge; which I merely introduced as a type of an endless and exasperating misunderstanding which is always occurring in modern England. To get men out of a rookery men are put into a tenement; and at the beginning the healthy human soul loathes them both. A man's first desire is to get away as far as possible from the rookery, even should his mad course lead him to a model dwelling. The second desire is, naturally, to get away from the model dwelling, even if it should lead a man back to the rookery. But I am neither Hudgian nor a Gudgian. *** Neither Hudge nor Gudge had ever thought for an instant what sort of house a man might probably like for himself. In short, they did not begin with the ideal; and, therefore, were not practical politicians.*

Much of American politics follows the Hudge-Gudge model, producing failure for both conservatives and liberals -- the former offering us an army of the homeless and the latter presenting us finally with drug-infested housing projects. Both, in their own way, have obeyed Lloyd George's dictum that "if these poor people are to be redeemed they must be redeemed not by themselves. *** They must be redeemed by others outside."

To break this cycle, we must not only change our political policies but the very way we regard politics. We are all, to some degree, children of the progressive faith in governmental experts, the New Deal faith in governmental social action, and the conservative faith in governmental social control.

Until we bring politics home -- devolving its power, abdicating its expertise, and undermining its arrogance -- we will remain trapped in a temple to a false god.

Bart Giamatti, long before he became baseball commissioner, wrote: "Baseball is about going home and how hard it is to get there and how driven is our need. It

I pledge allegiance
To all Life
And to the Earth
upon which we live
And to my family
And the World community
One People
One Universe
Indivisible
With Peace, Liberty
and Justice
For All

Reproduction of a postcard sold by the Sunflower School, RD 3, Box 3732, Grove City, PA 16172. $1 for 5 cards.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tells us how good home is. Its wisdom says you can go home again but that you cannot stay. The journey must always start once more, the bat an oar over the shoulder, until there is an end to all journeying."

True politics -- in imitation of baseball, the great American metaphor -- is also about going home. Members of Congress consider it the sina qua non of their routine. Presidential candidates engage in an elaborate, if disingenuous, ceremony of finding the American home during primary season. And in between, everyone in politics pays extraordinary attention to political shamans like Gallup and Roper whose magical powers center on their understanding of what's happening "at home."

But like so much in our national life, we are only going through the motions, paying ritualistic obeisance to a faith we no longer follow. In fact, we have lost our way home.

o

I recently attended a planning session for a liberal conference that is to focus on the Bill of Rights. Several of us suggested that we might want to consider what the Bill of Rights left out and proposed a panel on the "natural rights" of Americans. The idea excited me because it offered an opportunity to examine what it meant to be a real live American human, not merely an American legal or economic entity. It might be the beginning, for liberals at least, of restoring the idea of the actual individual -- rather than the aggregated individual -- to the center of liberal thought and policies.

The idea was quickly shot down, in part because it was argued that the poor and the suffering did not have the luxury of such "New Age" concepts. I was tempted to point out that Locke, Rousseau and Madison were not exactly proto-hippies and that the Declaration of Independence had not been written by Jerry Brown, but I settled for noting that the preferred topic of economic rights seemed too limiting. The group momentarily flirted with reducing its goal still further -- to the evergreen "human needs," but eventually found its way back to "economic rights."

We had, at least for a moment, touched on the hidden debate in American politics. On one side of this debate stand the liberals, the conservatives and the marxists and on the other the libertarians, greens, and other decentralists of varied stripe. What, we were really discussing, is politics about?

In one corner were those who saw the individual as a baby of the state, seeking fulfillment of "human needs." The word *needs* is a favored one in both governmental and progressive circles, and hardly any who constantly use it perceive the extraordinary dependency it suggests.

In another corner -- the one preferred by capitalists, marxists and many liberals -- were those who saw the individual as possessing certain rights, but still being at heart primarily an economic creature.

Finally, there were those who, while not denigrating economic rights, saw the rights of humans extending far beyond matters of survival and fiscal equity to include such matters as the right of privacy, the right of the individual as inherently superior to that of a corporation, the right to follow one's own moral vision, the right to make one's own mistakes in peace, the right of a community to govern itself and the right of an individual to be served by the state and not be a servant of that state.

We were preparing to discuss the Bill of Rights on its 200th anniversary. Somehow it seemed relevant that a year from now we would observe the 300th anniversary of what might be called liberalism's first position paper, in which John Locke argued that the state exists to preserve the natural rights of its citizens.

o

Such issues may seem far removed from the drug wars of our cities. Yet the armed zombies wandering our streets are grim examples of what can be produced by a society that pretends such issues don't matter. By caring only marginally for the economic survival of our inner cities and not at all for their soul or culture, by denying individual dignity and worth to their residents, by denying them money, power or even adequate audience, the system has created the environment in which the drug wars have flourished.

Here is the payoff for not caring about the intangibles of human existence; for providing education, shelter and social services on the cheap; and for excessive faith in a megasystem that cannot respond to a reality that stretches only a few blocks.

Following the advice of Daniel Burnam, we have made no small plans and thus we find ourselves, finally, with no small solutions.

We cannot hope to work our way out this dilemma by more great plans and massive "wars." We must take the time to recreate what we have destroyed: the human being as the center and purpose of our system. We must do this not only to end the drug violence but to have a reason for America to continue to exist. The conflict can no longer be the phoney battle between liberals and conservatives that leave us the Hobson's choice of control by huge corporations, huge government, or a conspiracy between the two. The question is whether we can restore the individual and the community to the center of American life. If we can't, then surely the American dream is over.

Weather Report

Several hundred citizens of Washington, DC, gathered recently in a church to watch Ted Koppel interrupting people for nearly four hours on national TV. The Koppel extravaganza about Washington and its drug problems was somewhat more dignified than the Geraldo production (same subject, same day, same channel) that preceded it, but nonetheless it suggested the need for communities to adopt a zero tolerance policy towards network television hosts who want to solve their problems.

I watched the entire show, right through to the closing redeeming minutes when an unidentified woman silenced everyone in the room -- including Koppel -- with an impassioned and perceptive plea to deal with the drug problem in human terms.

From the start, Koppel seemed uncertain as to the subject matter for the evening. The show was

(Please turn to page 8)

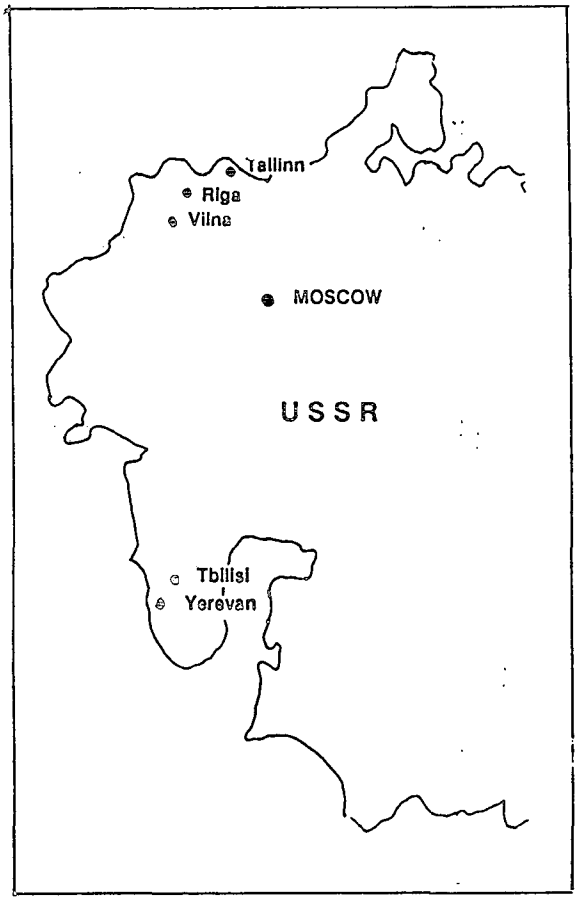
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Devolution, Soviet-style

Thomas S. Martin

It had to happen, though no one looked for it to happen so soon. Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika,* or restructuring, has opened a Pandora's box of separatist and devolutionary movements in the Soviet Union. Of course, Moscow's suppression of ethnic nationalism has always been an uphill battle. At no time in its thousand-year history has the Russian state been purely Russian. The Ukraine was ruled from the beginning by the line of princes that became the Muscovite tsars, but no Ukrainian likes being called a Russian. The Tatars were absorbed into the empire centuries ago, followed by Armenia and Georgia, central Asia, Belorussia, and other regions. The Baltic states enjoyed a brief independence after World War I but were occupied again by Stalin in 1940. The consolidation and expansion of Soviet power silenced the nationalities for a time, but now that Gorbachev has launched his campaign of democratization, dozens of ethnic groups are again clamoring for self-rule. The government has suggested amendments to the Soviet constitution that would bring the economy under joint control of central and republic commissariats, a return to the federal structure proposed by Lenin but nullified under Stalin. In fact, the changes would further unify and homogenize the Soviet economy, draining resources from the republics and autonomous regions for the benefit of the majority ethnic Russians. Understandably, the nationalities object. The most remarkable feature of Soviet devolutionism is that the Kremlin doesn't seem to have anticipated it.

Ironically, the flames of resistance are being fanned by the government-owned press, exercising its new freedom under Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy. Must of what we know about the separatist movements in the Caucasus and the Baltic states comes from newspapers in Moscow and in the capitals of the republics. The first stirrings were reported from Kazakhstan in December 1986. At this writing the newest movement is emerging among the Tatars, who are calling for a considerable expansion of the Tatar autonomous republic. The first real outburst of nationalist sentiment came in Armenia in February 1988, when rioters demanded the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh, a small enclave which lies within Azerbaijan but is populated mostly by Armenians. The republic government in Yerevan hoped to build a factory there to provide work for impoverished Armenians, but no one was prepared for the violent reaction of the Azerbaijanis. Labor



unrest and then hunger strikes attracted thousands of participants, and a few people have been killed. The Kremlin has condemned the movement, accusing it of trying to undermine *perestroika* and the internationalist principles of Marxism. Azerbaijani extremists were arrested, and in November one Akhmet Akhmetov was condemned to death for organizing "pogroms, murder and arson."

The catastrophic earthquake of December 1988, naturally enough, has put Armenian nationalism on the back burner for a while; Nagorno-Karabakh has been placed under direct administration from Moscow. But even before the disaster the focus of Soviet devolutionism had moved to the Baltic states. Since the annexation half a century ago, many ethnic Russians have migrated into Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which are more heavily industrialized than most of the Soviet

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Union. They now constitute nearly half the population of the region. Native culture has been generally suppressed in a misguided effort to assimilate the Baltic peoples. But when Gorbachev announced plans last year to devolve some economic and political authority back to the republics, smoldering national sentiment burst into flame. Demonstrators demanded more automomy, the restoration of national symbols and languages, and limits on Russian immigration. By last fall, grassroots movements had coalesced in all three Baltic states. These "people's fronts" claim to be loyal to Marxist-Leninist principles and call for greater local participation in *perestroika*. The Moscow government has attempted, with varying degrees of success, to co-opt the people's fronts and drive out the "extremists." Gorbachev even claims that he "managed only with great difficulty to withstand pressure" from Kremlin hard-liners to fuse all the republics into one super-state.

The Western media have reported this nationalist phenomenon with ill-concealed glee, seeing it as evidence of the economic and political failure of Communism. Never mind that similar devolutionary movements are under way in the capitalist world. The Soviet press, for its part, has been surprisingly open about the "problem," rebuking the separatists but also acknowledging the legitimate ethnic pride of the federated republics. But neither American nor Soviet leaders have recognized the devolution process for what it really it. These demands for autonomy are not a rejection of Marxism, or a promotion of capitalism. They are more than clamoring for a greater voice at the Kremlin. They are nothing less than a renunciation of large-scale statism. Small nations absorbed and oppressed by larger ones have always known that powerful centralized states are the most destructive invention of western civilization, but only in the past half century have these people are acquired the means to vocalize their dissent and organize their opposition. The devolutionary process is already well under way in the Third World and is making progress in Europe and among American Indians. It has taken a little longer in the Soviet Union, but its turn has now come.

Let's take a closer look at the situation in the Baltic states, as seen by the Soviet press. Most Americans know about Estonia's declaration of sovereignty last November 16. The declaration was part of a political move to block suggested changes in the Soviet constitution and electoral system. Gorbachev's laws proposed the creation of a new and powerful legislature, the Congress of People's Deputies. About one-third of the deputies were elected by interest groups and professional organizations, rather than on a geographic basis. This will effectively reduce the representation of the republics and shift more power into the hands of the central government. Gorbachev also wants a stronger Supreme Soviet, its powers ominously ill-defined. The object, of course, is to homogenize the Soviet Union, in the same way that strengthening the American federal government weakens state and local authority. The Estonian Supreme Soviet responded bravely. It assumed sovereignty over all lands, resources and means of production in Estonia, recognized "personal, private and mixed property," and guaranteed protection of civil and political rights. It claimed the authority to approve or reject all laws passed by the Supreme Soviet in Moscow, and to suspend existing law if they violate Estonian sovereignty. The Tallinn government resolved that "the draft laws in question provide for a substantial restriction of the Union republics' sovereignty and essentially ignore the inalienable right of peoples to self-determination." Only seven members voted against these declarations and amendments, and one of these claims that many delegates were bribed or pressured to vote yes by the People's Front and other separatist extremists.

Ten days later Gorbachev responded, informing the Estonian Supreme Soviet that its actions were unconstitutional. He accused the delegates of "misusing" the concepts of *perestroika* and decentralization, and accused them of knuckling under to anti-socialist, reactionary and nationalist pressures. "Does it make sense," he asked, "to push for exclusiveness and a subsistence economy when integration, the division of labor and cooperation have become the leading objective trends in the world, and when a breakthrough to a new level of quality in many countries is ensured specifically on the basis of pooling money and resources?" This astonishingly capitalist statement only proves that the centrifugal energies of devolution, rather than economic ideologies, are the real motive force in today's world. The General Secretary only dug himself in deeper when he went on to say that *glasnost* encourages freedom of opinion, "but it is unacceptable when an attempt is made not only to convey one's opinion . . . but also to impose that opinion, to exert pressure, to distort the will of the working people or Deputies. This is not democracy." In other words, "democracy" is the right to *hold* your own opinion, but not to persuade anyone else.

The Supreme Soviet followed Gorbachev's lead, declaring the Estonian actions "null and void." Popular demonstrations immediately broke out in Tallinn. Banners could be seen with slogans like "Sovereignty and Consolidation," "An End to Colonial Policy in Estonia," and "Estonia Is Not a Province." The Estonian press mentioned "Bolshevik occupation" and fond memories of pre-1940 fascism (a tactical error, playing right into Moscow's hands). There were reports of attacks on Soviet soldiers and vandalism in military cemeteries.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The situation in Lithuania is similar, though the Supreme Soviet in Vilna did not declare sovereignty. Sajudis, the "Movement for Restructuring," has succeeded in pressuring the Soviet into adopting the national flag, coat of arms and anthem of pre-1940 Lithuania, and has called for a revival of the old folk holidays, "reinterpreted through the prism of the ideals of socialist society." First Secretary R. Songaila, a hard-liner, was replaced by the Gorbachev-moderate Algirdas Brazauskas, who has praised Sajudis. The Soviet last fall created a Russian Cultural Center for the ethnic Russians of Lithuania, restored several historic Catholic churches, and gave permission for a new church to be built in Vilna. It is considering the legalization of religious instruction for children by priests (at present, only parents may give such instruction). Admissions to the Catholic seminary at Kaunas are up. Perhaps most significantly, religious ceremonies for the aged and sick in state nursing homes are now permitted. Soviet law has always forbidden the use of government-owned institutions for religious purposes.

The chairman of the Latvian People's Front is 33-year-old Dainis E. Ivans, a Communist Party member and a delegate to last summer's party congress in Moscow. He has called for a monument to the Lativian Jewish victims of fascism, all-Latvian units within the Soviet army, and bonuses for veterans of the Afghanistan war. So far the republic Soviet has voted only to spend more on food and housing and to limit industrial development in Latvia, citing ecological worries. Still, the People's Front claims to represent all Latvians, and evidently has ties with Radio Free Europe and Latvian emigres in western Europe and the United States. When it emerged last October it was complimented by the Communist Party for its support of *perestroika,* but now it stands accused of nationalism, exclusivism and departures from Maxist-Leninist ideology. The republic's government has tried valiantly to co-opt the People's Front. Riga Cathedral was returned to the Lutherans, and the new First Secretary, Jan Vagris, gave his maiden speech at the Front's constituent congress. These unsubtle efforts have only further radicalized the movement. An "International Front" has been formed by labor collectives to support Gorbachev's policies and to counteract the People's Front. "Interfront" claims 300,000 members, mostly ethnic Russians. In this face-off between the two fronts we see a classic example of centripetal statism versus centrifugal devolutionism.

Moscow is evidently less worried about ethnic separatism in Azerbaijan, since it has taken a far tougher stand there. According to Pravda, the "opponents of *perestroika"* in that southern republic are linked with organized crime. They are "exponents of the petit bourgeois ideology and a narrow-minded, philistine, anarchistic morality, who worship the golden calf of gain and enrichment." The nationalist leader Neimat Panakhov, an "instigator and dangerous demagogue," works closely with one Gatami, "an obscurantist and reactionary who urges people to return to the darkness of the middle ages." Azerbaijani nationalism, says Moscow, is no more than a cover-up for large-scale corruption and crime, supported by bureaucrats who fear the new broom of *perestroika*. The "moss-covered dogmas" of the intelligentsia oppose restructuring for their own obscurantist reasons. Panakhov, a machinist, organized workers' demonstrations and strikes last fall, and has now been arrested for "fomenting national discord." His trial is pending.

The Georgian nationalist movement Shota Rustaveli has been more successful. It persuaded the republic Soviet to emphasize Georgian language instruction in schools, and was able to halt construction of a railway line in the Caucasus Mountains for ecological reasons. Rallies and hunger strikes have been staged in front of Government House in Tbilisi, the hammer-and-sickle flag has been pulled down, Communist Party and Komsomol cards have been turned in by the hundreds, and delegates to the Soviet have been threatened. Over one hundred young people were hospitalized after a hunger strike in November. After the Armenian quake, refugees who crossed into Georgia were sometimes attacked and harassed, according to *Pravda*. Significantly, the same newspaper quoted the separatist leader Gamsakhurdia when he called that report a lie.

The ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union has linked ethnic separatism with a denial of socialist internationalism, and accuses the people's fronts of trying to undermine Lenin's ideal "union and friendship of our peoples." The Kremlin fails to see that separatism is not incompatible with the friendship of peoples. But it *is* incompatible with domination and imperialism. The concerns of the people's fronts are often ecological, and this is no coincidence. The nationalists recognize that centralization and co-ordination of industry and agriculture, always a centerpiece of Soviet economics, is as dangerous to the environment as it is to ethnic diversity. The government, for its part, realizes that an increasingly centralized, capitalist-style economy cannot coexist with the sort of decentralized political structure called for by the nationalities. "Today no republic, no province, no region, no ministry can work in seclusion," say Poliburo member and KGB boss V. M. Chebrikov. It may be the last desperate cry of Soviet statism.

Thomas Martin teaches history at Antioch College, He is the author of Minds & Hearts: The American Revolution as a Philosophical Crisis (1984).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Weather Report Cont'd

titled "Divided City," that invincible urban cliche of our times, but the primary subject matter was allegedly drugs and crime. The relationship between title and subject was not always clear.

Washington is indeed a divided city. But it is not divided just one way -- black vs white -- as the show implied but in a dozen different ways of significance e.g. federal vs. local, rich vs. poor, blacks with power vs. those without, parents vs. people who think of kids as being mainly a problem.

And while the black vs. white polarity does have relevance in the discussion about drugs the nature of this relevance barely surfaced during the program.

The best Koppel could do was to lend an ABC camera to some black teenagers who went to white Georgetown and filmed themselves not being able to get change for a bus ride. This is an interesting subject in itself, involving such questions as the silent signals both cultures send, whether a woman being apprehensive about being approached by three large youths is akin to activities in South Africa and whether Washingtonians are friendly to strangers of any skin color, but it hardly illuminates the drug issue.

Those citizens who managed -- with no little effort -- to participate in the program did not help matters much by an avalanche of criticisms of "racism" without specifics. There is a suspicion, voiced during the sixties drug hysteria and again today, that the war on drugs is not all it seems -- that in fact it may be an excuse for exercising authoritarian social control over potentially troublesome groups including youth in general and urban black youth in particular. The CIA's long involvement with drug trafficking (going back to the post-World War II years), the ethnic differential between the drug overlords and the drug drones, and the repressive tactics adopted to "fight drugs," all provide circumstantial evidence. Little of this surfaced. What we got instead was a generalized paranoia that brought cheers without insight.

A local black psychiatrist confused matters further by presenting her convoluted theories about white male fear that black men are going to take their women and eradicate their race. She was of the ilk that moves from ethnic delusions of grandeur to hopeless ethnic determinism without missing a beat. Another citizen suggested statistics were part of the plot against black people.

Such high-flying assertions are familiar to afficienados of DC politics, but many out-of-town viewers must have found them a bit startling.

It is therefore worth noting that those participating on the program were hardly a representative sample of the city. Koppel, displaying his well-known predeliction for white male Republicans, imported two from the Bush administration (William Bennett and Jack Kemp) and let them hog the first part of the "town meeting," even though neither is a registered voter of DC. And the black participants included a number of politically evangelical media mavens, some of whom managed to get to both the Koppel and the Geraldo show. It was a busy day.

Meanwhile, not appearing on the show were any members of the city council, any of several candidates for mayor (with the exception of Barry), the public health commissioner, the leading black businessman who told a local news reporter during the 11 pm break that his children always had a nice time in Georgetown, advocates for drug decriminalization, or a wealth of community activists who do what they do with both skill and modesty. Instead one got a sense of what a black Morton Downey Jr. audience might be like.

The show was so bad that it made Geraldo's prancing around and waving his arms seem almost preferable. Geraldo jammed more viewpoints into his hour than Koppel accomplished in four. Besides, Geraldo seemed to like his audience while Koppel acted like a harrassed and prissy school teacher who could hardly wait for the weekend.

Interestingly, there were apparently plenty of people in the room who could have contributed something. But the social darwinism of the show prevailed. Besides, if they were smart enough to have something to say, most were also smart enough to realize that when you go to a circus you don't enter the ring to feed the lion.--*s.s.*

Classifieds

PROGRESSIVE PERIODICALS DIRECTORY just published! Reviews/details on 600 periodicals -- peace, environment, labor, culture, international, organizing, etc. Networking, publicity, subscription information. $8. Box 120574, Nashville TN 37212

702 women's periodicals listed and described in the 1989 *Directory of Women's Media*, plus 20 other media categories. Send $15 to Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, 3306 Ross Place, N.W., No. 2, Washington, DC 20008. Dr. Martha Leslie Allen, Editor.

The Progressive Review
1739 Connecticut Ave NW
Washington DC 20009-8922
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

[ ] One year $12
[ ] Two years $21
[ ] Contribution enclosed $____

Mail with check or money order to address above

Subscriber Newsletter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED